

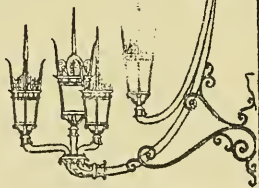
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**GOVERNMENT CENTER STUDY**  
**A Preliminary Report**  
**Boston City Planning Board**  
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GOVERNMENT CENTER STUDY

A Preliminary Report

August 1956

Boston City Planning Board

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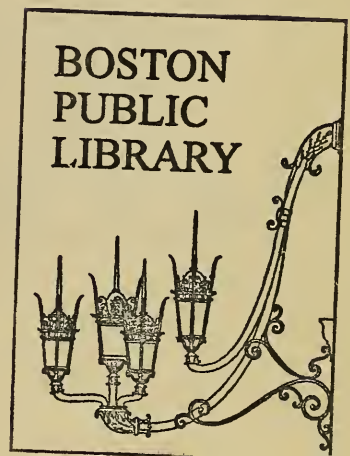
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## INTRODUCTION

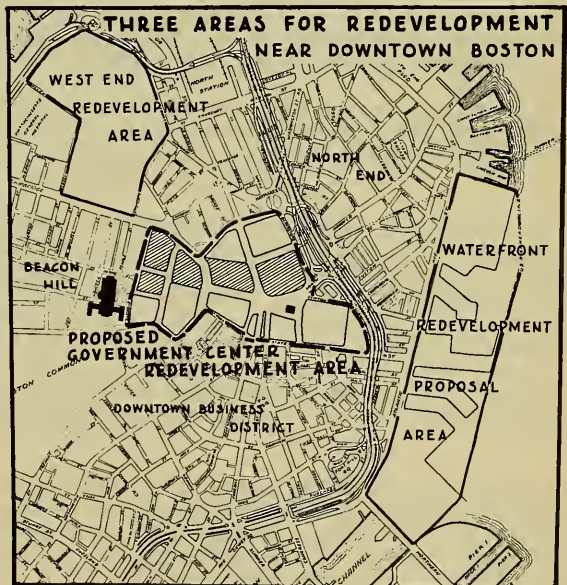
This report of the Boston City Planning Board proposes the creation of a new, integrated government administrative center in the vicinity of Pemberton Square-Dock Square. As proposed, this government center would include a new City Hall, a new Federal Building, new state office buildings, and, in time, a new courthouse structure. Text and attached exhibits recommend a suggested layout. Preliminary basic development costs are also estimated.

One of the prime features of the suggested scheme is the proposal that the creation of this government center be taken as an opportunity to stimulate an extensive private redevelopment program as well in this marginal area north of State Street, for this area is seen as having a significant potential for new commercial development, for office buildings particularly. Accordingly, this report begins to suggest the magnitude of this potential for private development, and where and how this is most likely to be realized. It is to be noted, for example, that this area has a potential for a tax base of better than twice the reported 1954 assessed valuation.

This report also proposes several significant street improvements for the area as further objectives of the large-scale redevelopment program recommended.

Discussion of this government center proposal is particularly desirable at this time in view of the fact that new federal, state, and city government structures are all accepted as immediate needs.

Discussion of this scheme is also timely (a) in part because of the impact which the newly-constructed Central Artery is likely to have on this area, and (b) no less significantly because of the current interest in two additional prospective redevelopment projects in the immediate vicinity - for the West End, and for the North End waterfront.





A proposed extension of the downtown office area, including the recommended creation of a new government administrative center

THE PROBLEM

1. There is a long-standing need for new centrally-located government office buildings in or convenient to the downtown business district. Most generally accepted is the need for a new City Hall, new state office buildings, and a new Federal Building. To a degree, these new facilities are needed as replacements for structures which, though still in use, have long outlived their period of efficient service. More significantly, these new government buildings are needed to consolidate bureaus which, for want of a better alternative, have had to spread out more and more into space rented in private office buildings, converted residences, and the like. In addition, the growing need for space to accommodate expanding government programs must be anticipated as such.

2. Boston's downtown business district, despite the generally advanced age of its physical plant, offers few sites both suitable and available for new office building construction. This is particularly true of the area within and immediate to the principal downtown "office area" centered at Post Office Square (see Exhibit A). Sites for new office buildings will nevertheless have to be located (or created), for the prospect is for increasing demands for downtown office space. In the interests of convenience and accessibility, furthermore, this new development should, where possible, be accommodated within the vicinity of the principal office area in the business district.

3. Particularly ripe for change is an area immediately to the north of this office district - the 50-acre area extending north of State Street (and Beacon) to Sudbury and Cambridge Streets, and east of Bowdoin to the Central Artery (see Exhibit A).

Changes of significant proportions would be in order for this area merely to improve the area's physical condition and layout. Present structures are, with few exceptions, ancient and ill-adapted to current uses. Deterioration and neglect is characteristic. The vacancy ratio is the highest in the entire business district. In addition, the area is encumbered with a hopeless confusion of streets which alone occupy nearly one-half of the total area. The street blocks themselves are, in more cases than not, too small or irregular in form to serve as efficient sites for structures of contemporary design.

At the same time, significant changes will be required to realize what may be seen as the area's potential for development. Much of this potential arises from the area's accessibility, to which the Artery has made a recent vital contribution. Further significant potential for such marginal areas can be read into the need to alleviate present downtown congestion as inevitable business district growth is accommodated.



## THE PROPOSAL

### A. The substance of the proposal

1. The potential for change in this delineated problem area presents the most significant opportunity for creating an extension of the present downtown office area. The greater part of this delineated area should, therefore, be subjected to a redevelopment program of major proportions toward this end.

2. The development of this extension to the downtown office area should be designed to create a government administrative center (federal, state, and local) as well as extensive new office facilities for private use.

3. The development of this new office area should be carried out in such a way that the construction of the government office buildings serve to prime the total redevelopment program.

4. This priming strategy would be most suggestively carried through by developing the northernmost tier of newly-created blocks as the government administrative center, leaving the section more immediate to the present downtown office area for the new private development.

5. The opportunity of this broad-scale development program should be taken to create a simplified and efficient street system within the delineated problem area, including these two significant improvements to the major street system particularly:

a. Provision of a satisfactory connection between Cambridge Street and Dock Square (and the ramp and tunnel entrances at North and Cross Streets); and

b. Provision of a more direct connection between Portland and Devonshire Streets.

6. As an improved street pattern is achieved for this area, the opportunity of this redevelopment operation should at the same time be taken to create more generous blocks for new development, as improvements over the present constricting pattern of small and awkward blocks imposed by the area's confusing and inefficient street complex.



## B. Selected aspects of a preliminary redevelopment scheme

### A tentative land use plan

#### 1. Proposed street changes and a new block pattern

Most significant thing about the proposal for streets is the recommendation that much of their mileage be eliminated in the interest of creating not only more ample settings for new development, but a more efficient street system itself. Exhibit C identifies the streets which would be retained or eliminated according to the present proposal. It will be noticed that one 500-foot stretch of new street has been added to serve as a direct connection between Cambridge Street and Dock Square. (This cuts thru just north of Brattle, and follows a line sufficiently east-west to afford a visual connection between Faneuil Hall and the newer Courthouse building.) Portland Street has also been cut thru to Dock Square, thus affording an important surface route for northbound traffic in-town from the Artery. In addition, most of the retained major streets are seen to be marked for widening, and in some cases realignment, in large part because of their direct relationship or proximity to the Artery and the Tunnel. Nonetheless, the present proposal is that street improvements in this area should be in the direction of less acreage in streets, and more acreage for development; fewer and more serviceable streets, fewer and bigger blocks.

#### 2. Proposed use of newly-created blocks

For purposes of reviewing the generalized use plan (see Exhibit D), the key place-reference is the new street proposed as a connection between Cambridge Street and Dock Square: the blocks proposed as sites for the new government buildings lie north of the east-west axis established by this street; and the greater part of the area for new private development extends south of this line to State Street (and Beacon).

One important reason for suggesting this basic arrangement has already been alluded to, namely, that having a government center located as proposed would offer the strongest inducement to new private development of the remainder of the area. So situated, the government center would create a new and attractive environment for the most extensive area. It is also to be noticed that the more significant street improvements would be introduced in the course of creating the proposed center. Additional support for this basic arrangement is contributed by these further circumstances:

a. Land valuation within the delineated problem area tends to be lowest in the section designated for the government center (see Exhibit B).

b. This proposed arrangement is consistent with structural density controls being assigned to this area by the zoning ordinance in process of preparation. (For the blocks fronting on State Street, for example, an FAR of 8.0 or more is to be assigned; whereas for the area north of Pemberton Square-Dock Square, a maximum of between 4.0 and 6.0 has been thought sufficient.)



B. Selected aspects of a preliminary redevelopment scheme (cont'd)

A tentative land use plan (cont'd)

c. Although the government center would be somewhat removed from the heart of the retail district, the proposed location is still conveniently reached by rapid transit.

In makeup, the government center would include state office buildings, a new City Hall, and a new Federal Building, which, as proposed by Exhibit D, would occupy Blocks A1, C1, and C2, respectively. (A fourth component for the center would be the County Courthouse, including perhaps a replacement to the older courthouse structure on Pemberton Square.) Block A1 has been designated as the site for the new state office buildings because of its proximity to the State House, and because this site would appear to be adequate in size for the accommodations tentatively programmed (750,000 sq. ft.). Block C1 is preferred over C2 as the site for the City Hall primarily because of its central and more prominent location; although it is also to be added that the new Federal Building should be assigned the larger site purely on the basis of the intended size of the plant. (Preliminary reports are that it should provide close to 1,000,000 sq. ft. of floorspace, versus an estimated requirement for approximately 300,000 sq. ft. for City Hall.)

Of the four blocks in the area south of Pemberton Square-Dock Square which have been designated for new private development (with officespace as the prospective predominant use), B5 and A3 would have the greatest potential, if for no other reason because they are the largest of the four. The potential which can be visualized for Blocks B1 and B2 is nevertheless significant, primarily because of their strategic location. To suggest the magnitude of this new development which the proposed government center would tend to induce; at an assumed development density of between 6.0 and 8.0 for the greater part of B5, this block alone has a capacity for approximately 1,500,000 sq. ft. of new floorspace.

Exhibit E has been prepared to carry the foregoing land use plan one step further. No attempt has been made to design the structures as such. Accordingly, this scheme is more of an illustration than a recommendation. It may nevertheless serve in visualizing the layout and physical form which the area's public and private development potential may assume.

The government center is shown to be composed of public buildings exclusively -

a. The new state office buildings as two 20-story structures (and a third smaller structure as an extension of the retained MDC Bldg);

b. The new City Hall as a 16-story slab rising above a 2-story low-rise component (thought to be more suitable for council chambers, and officespace for departments dealing constantly with the public); and



## B. Selected aspects of a preliminary redevelopment scheme (cont'd)

### A tentative land use plan (cont'd)

c. The Federal Building as a structure in two or more sections, primarily to achieve a scale in keeping with that of the other buildings of the center.

A fourth possible component would be the replacement to the older courthouse building, shown here as an 8-story, 250,000 sq. ft. adjunct to the retained newer court building.

These government structures can form a unified development despite the fact that several street-blocks are involved. This can be achieved in large part by the harmonious placement of structures, although judicious landscaping would contribute to the same end, as illustrated.

For the private blocks, on the other hand, a somewhat different characteristic form may be expected to apply. With office-space being assumed as the predominant prospective use, these blocks would of course be dominated by the office buildings themselves. At the same time, however, much of the street frontage may be expected to be given over to ground-floor shops, which will themselves give these private blocks an appropriately commercial atmosphere, in contrast to the "public" atmosphere which should be characteristic of the government center. Accordingly, this distinction is reflected in the forms employed in representing development potential for these private blocks. The layout shown for Block A3 represents a development density of approximately 5.0, whereas for Blocks B1 and B5 an FAR of about 7.0 has been assumed. Among other things, observe that Block B5 has unique layout possibilities: the diagram has the prospective structures grouped around an interior pedestrian plaza which, besides unifying the development of the block itself, would also serve as an inviting point of attraction to the pedestrian from a wider area, particularly with a restored Faneuil Hall near at hand. Note also that this plaza becomes an extension of the Pemberton Square-Dock Square corridor - the principal axis to the entire area design.

Besides suggesting the number and arrangement of primary structures, Exhibit E also identifies the more likely sites for new garages in the area. Two of these (in blocks A1 and C2) would be constructed in the course of developing the government center; at least two additional ones should accompany the private development, one of them in Block A3, and the other between Block B5 and the Artery.



## B. Selected aspects of a preliminary redevelopment scheme (cont'd)

Estimated basic development costs for the government center

The following brief table supplies preliminary approximations (in millions of dollars) of the costs of site acquisition and construction for each of the four components of the government center as proposed.

	Total	Cost of Acquisition	Cost of Construction
<u>Gov't Center</u>	<u>\$46.0</u>	<u>\$12.0</u>	<u>\$34.0</u>
City	7.5	3.0	4.5
County	5.5	2.0	3.5
State	14.0	3.0	11.0
Federal	19.0	4.0	15.0

The acquisition cost items merely represent 150 percent of the 1954 assessed valuation of land and buildings occupying the respective sites. No attempt has been made to estimate such additional (and comparatively minor) site costs as demolition, removal of old utilities and installation of new, grading, and street improvements. More significantly, these are gross cost estimates. Net site costs (applying credits from the sale of land now occupied which would be returned to the private market) would be substantially lower in all cases. Indeed, the City, for one, should do better than break even on the transfer.

The construction costs, on the other hand, are merely intended to cover the primary structures themselves, with a conservative \$15 being the assumed average cost per sq. ft., and the inventory in each case as specified earlier in the memo. The cost of garages, for example, would be extra.



## B. Selected aspects of a preliminary redevelopment scheme (cont'd)

Summary of key consequences

Taken together, the recommended street improvements, the proposed government center, and the projected new private development would represent a change for this area of major proportions. The foregoing begins to suggest what this change would amount to in terms of improved layout, efficiency, and appearance. It remains to quantify these improvements in terms of the inventory and tax base represented.

In effect, this proposal (and its related projections) sees this area as offering the potential for (a) a significant net increase in physical plant for an extended downtown business district, and (b) an even more impressive addition to the tax base:

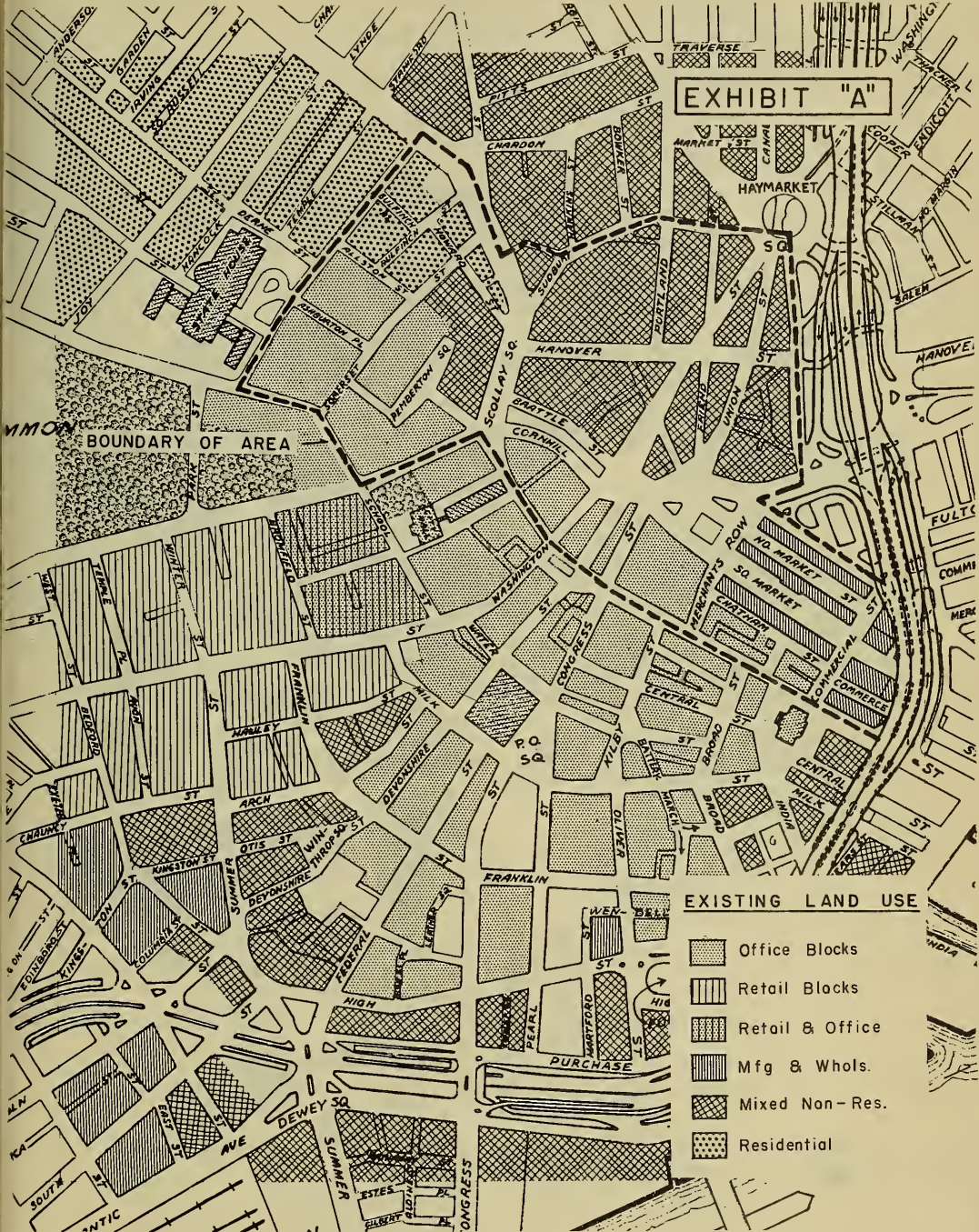
a. Conservative estimate is that this area has a potential capacity for between seven and eight million sq. ft. of accommodations, versus an existing five million occupied. A good part of this increment would be accounted for by the net increase in accommodations for government use (from an existing 1.5 million to a projected 2.5 million). At the same time, however, the taxable inventory could be increased significantly as well, from an existing 3.5 million sq. ft. occupied to between 4.5 and 5.5 million. (This is the projected capacity (i) assuming average development densities of between 4.0 and 6.0 for Blocks A3 and C3, and between 6.0 and 8.0 for Blocks B1, B2, and B5; and (ii) assuming that Blocks A4, B3, and B4 would be retained in much their present form.)

b. A correspondingly conservative estimate of potential tax base for this area is to the effect that potential taxable property would be assessed at between \$50 million to \$70 million, versus a 1954 total of \$25 million. Location of the new government structures as proposed would unavoidably remove some taxable property from the tax rolls. This temporary loss would, however, be more than made up by gains accountable to the new building which would be induced in the blocks designated for private development.

This, furthermore, is simply to approximate gains to inventory and tax base which can be assigned to the designated study area. It would be no exaggeration, however, to anticipate that the impact of such a large-scale development program would extend beyond State Street and Beacon and Sudbury. Consider, for example, the closely related re-use potential of the block bounded by Beacon, School, Washington, and Court, particularly after the departure of City Hall and the newspaper plant.



# EXHIBIT "A"





# EXHIBIT "B"

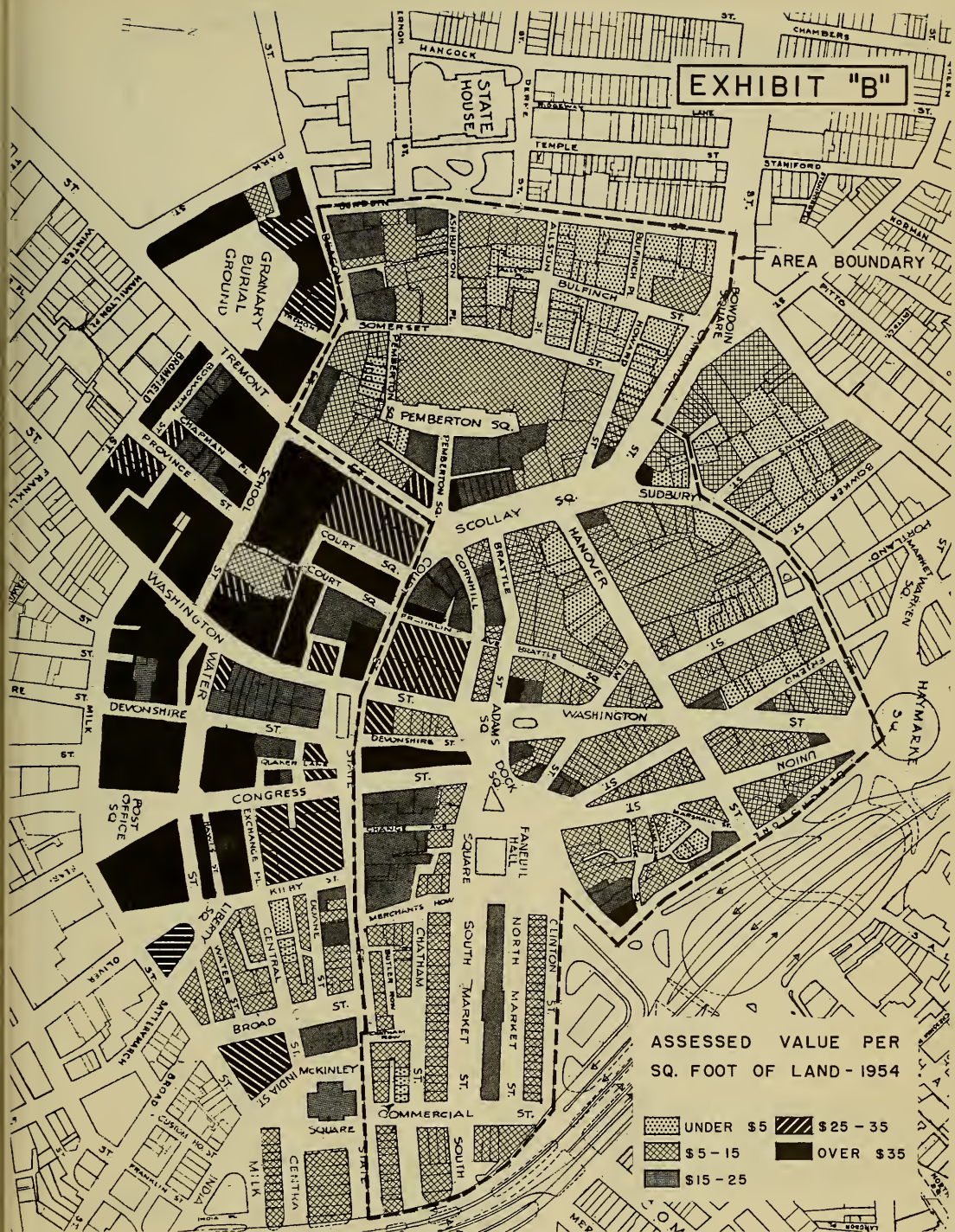
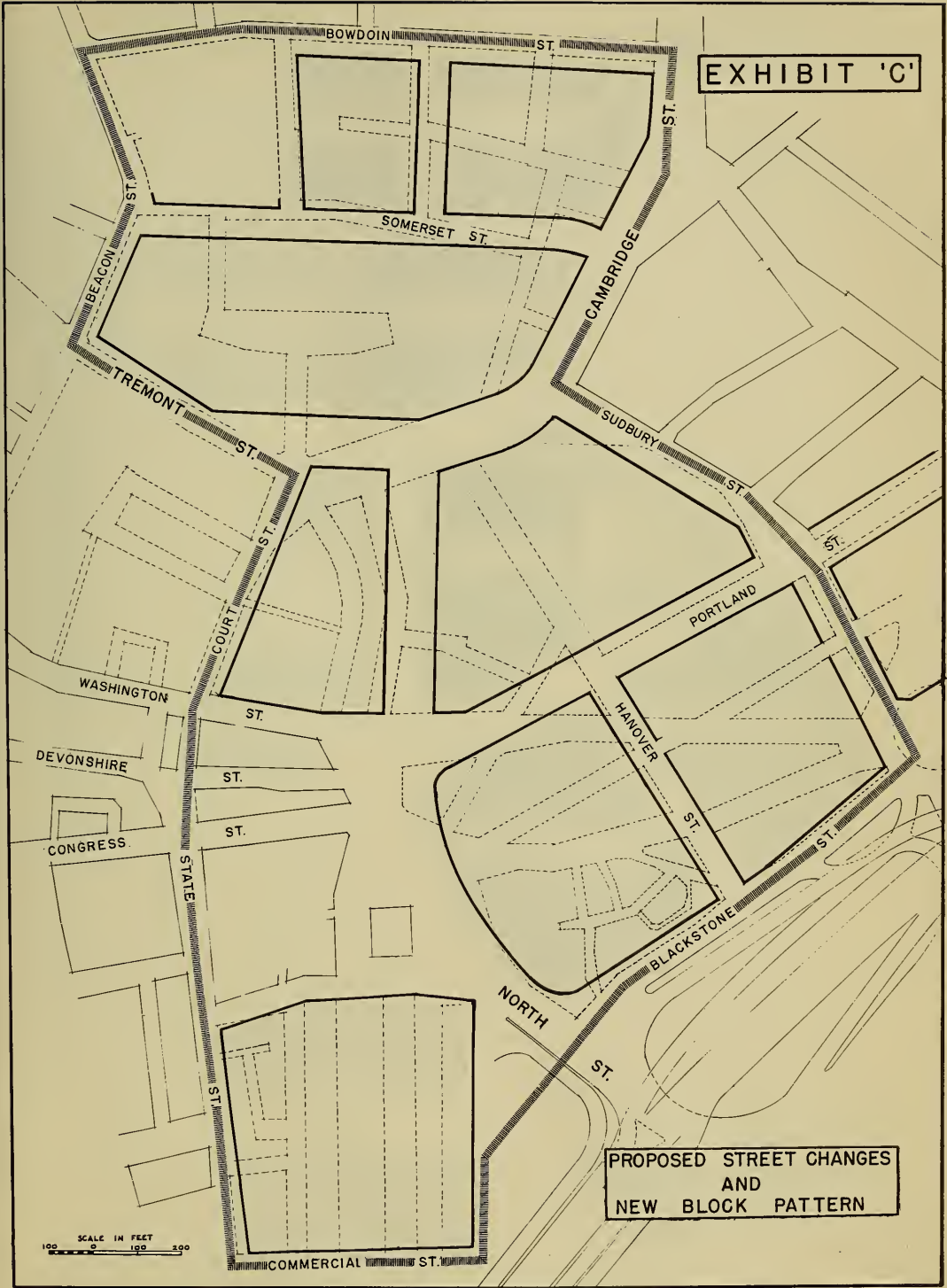




EXHIBIT 'C'

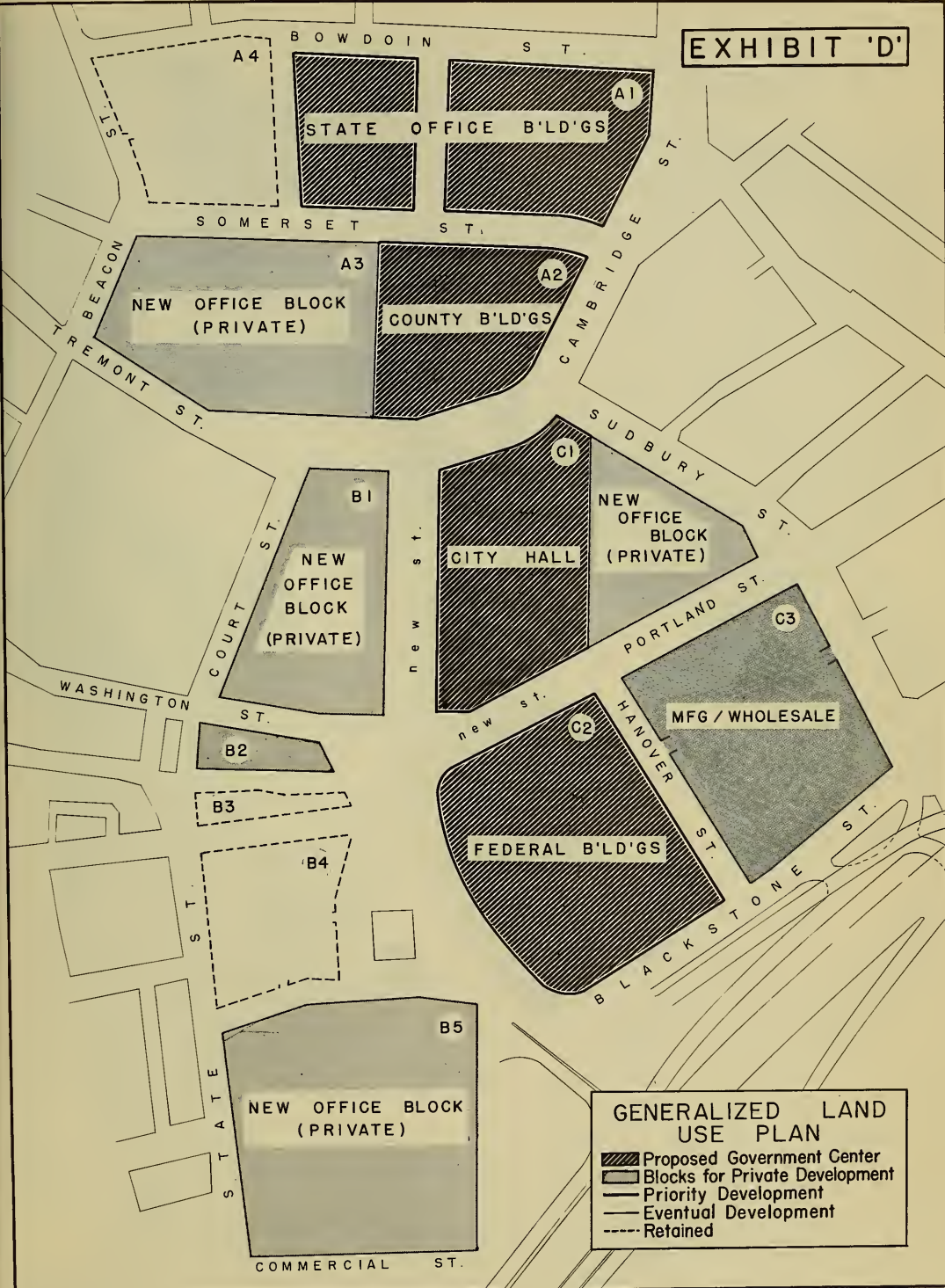


PROPOSED STREET CHANGES  
AND  
NEW BLOCK PATTERN

SCALE IN FEET  
0 100 190 290



# EXHIBIT 'D'





# EXHIBIT 'E'

## TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT

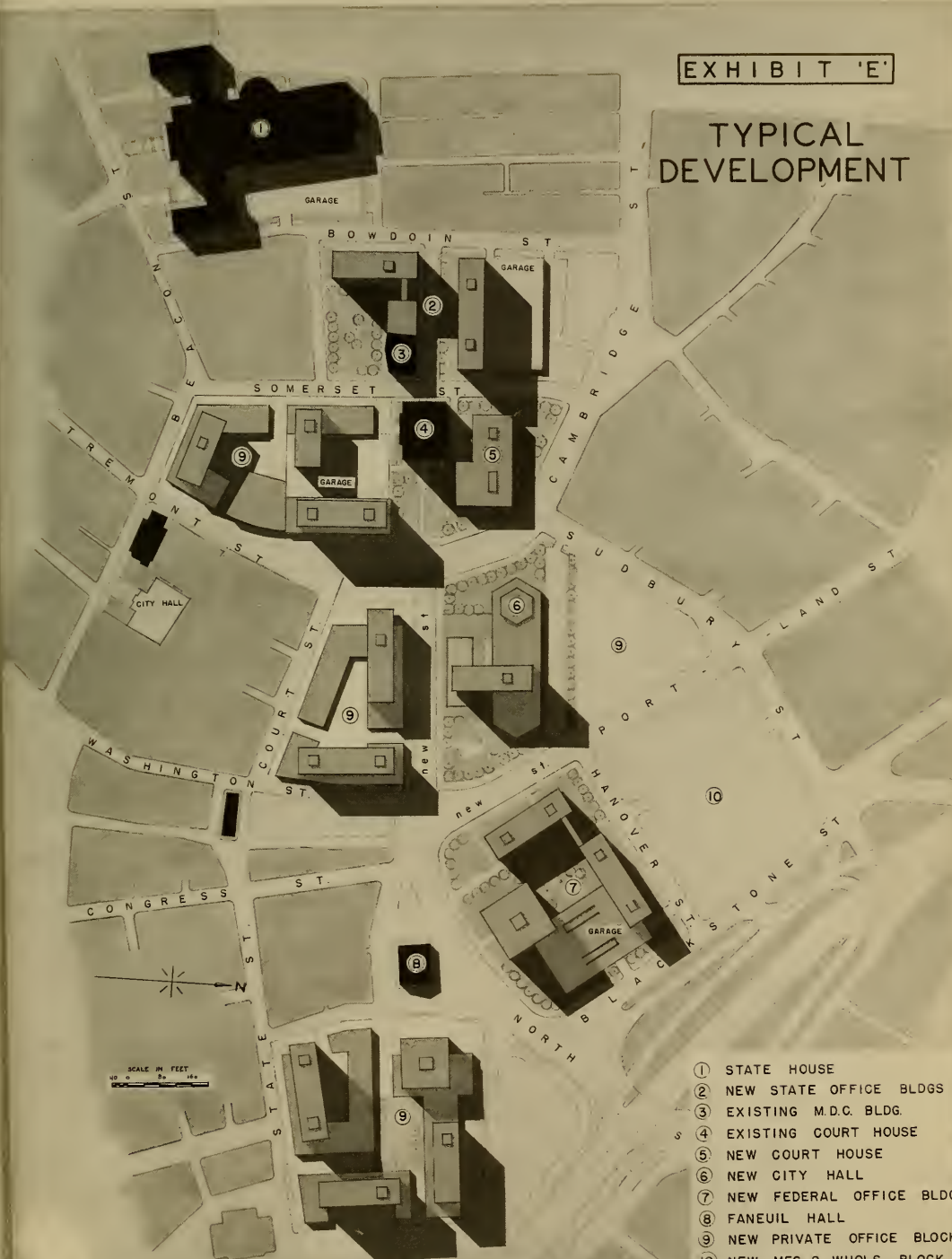


- (1) STATE HOUSE
- (2) NEW STATE OFFICE BLDGS
- (3) EXISTING M.D.C. BLDG
- (4) EXISTING COURT HOUSE
- (5) NEW COURT HOUSE
- (6) NEW CITY HALL
- (7) NEW FEDERAL OFFICE BLDG
- (8) FANEUIL HALL
- (9) NEW PRIVATE OFFICE BLOCK
- (10) NEW MFG & WHOLS. BLOCK



# EXHIBIT 'E'

## TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT



- ① STATE HOUSE
- ② NEW STATE OFFICE BLDGS
- ③ EXISTING M.D.C. BLDG.
- ④ EXISTING COURT HOUSE
- ⑤ NEW COURT HOUSE
- ⑥ NEW CITY HALL
- ⑦ NEW FEDERAL OFFICE BLDG
- ⑧ FANEUIL HALL
- ⑨ NEW PRIVATE OFFICE BLOCK
- ⑩ NEW MFG & WHOLS. BLOCK













